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AUTHOR Forward, John; Sapin, Cory
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ABSTRACT

Measures assessing non sex-typed behavior continue to define that behavior in traditional sex role terms. A status/role distinction formulation of behavior provides a broader context in which to account for the characteristics and competencies of an individual under specific circumstances. Under the status assignment model, individuals with a performative orientation tend to categorize acts in terms of specific roles. Individuals with a significance orientation are able to take into account the total "meaning" of the performance. To demonstrate that performative-oriented subjects would engage in sex role stereotyping, while significance-oriented subjects would evaluate each person/situation in terms of personal competence and behavior opportunities, 20 subjects (10 with a performative orientation; 10 with a significance orientation) rated observed behaviors in six scenarios, according to 20 adjectives from the Bem Sex Role Inventory. An analysis of the results showed that while performative subjects sex stereotyped the behavior of characters in all scenarios, the significance-oriented subjects showed no stereotyping effects. They rated each situation according to the appropriateness of behaviors in that situation and did not use irrelevent sex role prescriptions. In addition, performance-oriented subjects counter-stereotyped the obvious performative behavioral option in order to avoid presenting themselves as traditional sex role typers. Measures using the performance/significance orientation are able to overcome this social desirability bias in a way that current face-valid measures of androgyny are not. (BL)

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BEYOND SEX ROLES: A STATUS DYNAMIC FORMULATION

John Forward
University of Colorado

Cory Sapin
Kaiser Permanente
Denver, CO

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Beyond Sex Roles: A Status Dynamic Formulation

John Forward and Cory Sapin
University of Colorado Kaiser Permanente
Boulder, Colorado Denver, Colorado

The concept of "traditional sex-roles" and related research has been useful in understanding how a large number of people treat gender differences in our society (Ruble, Frieze & Parsons, 1976). But what of the smaller number who do not use traditional sex-role expectations as a cognitive template for interpersonal and social behavior?

The concept of "androgyny" has been developed as one way of describing non sex-typed behavior (Bem, 1974, 1977) and has proved useful in a number of respects (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). However, there are several drawbacks to the concept and related operationalizations that limit its usefulness.

A major problem is one that Sandra Bem (1981) has raised and that is that androgyny is still defined in traditional sex-role terms. What is needed is a conceptual reformulation that accounts for both sex-typed and non sex-typed behavior rather than attempting to describe non sex-typed behavior exclusively in sex-typed language.

Another problem is that current measures of androgyny are fairly obvious (face-valid) for many college students nowdays. There is a growing tendency for students to at least give lip-service to egalitarian ideas (Helmreich, Spence, & Gibson, 1982) and to avoid appearing to be too sex-typed in their responses to the tests. This has resulted in a growing percentage of students who rate all characteristics on the tests (M and F) as highly characteristic of themselves (Silvern & Ryan, 1980). This might be labeled the "super-person" syndrome.

The poster-presentation addresses both these issues by introducing a reformulation of sex-differences and a new methodology that is not so susceptible to social desirability and faking effects.

Status and Roles

The status/role distinction presented here borrows heavily from the conceptual resources of Descriptive Psychology (Davis, 1981; Ossorio, 1978). The distinction is presented at some length by Sapin (1979) and briefly summarized by Forward (1983).

In this formulation, as in many others, sex-roles are treated as specific, concrete characteristics and expectations that are routinely ascribed to a person solely on the basis of gender. As such, sex-roles are highly restrictive in that they ignore the actual characteristics of people, the significance of their behavior and the circumstances or context of their behavior. They are indeed gender stereotypes.

Sex-roles are contrasted with status and increased behavior potential. In Descriptive Psychology, personal status is a summary term for a person's place or standing within one relationship or a whole set of relationships. In these relationships, people assign each other (and negotiate) statuses with respect to a) what kind of people they are, b) what that kind of person can be expected to do, and c) how they are to be treated in everyday interactions. To the extent that status assignments are made taking into account the actual characteristics and competencies of the person and the actual circumstances involved, then behavior potential is maximized in the relationship or group.

Significance and Performance

To demonstrate the differences between status assignment and sex-role stereotyping, Sapin (1979) devised a measure to discriminate two kinds of

people. Those with a performative orientation tend to categorize specific acts in terms of prescribed roles while those with a significance orientation take into account the total "meaning" of the specific performance under observation. That is, they take account of the person's competences and characteristics and also the situational context of the act.

For example, while performative subjects would categorize confronting a bothersome smoker as an aggressive (and therefore masculine) behavior, they were unable to see confrontation as being part of a non-aggressive negotiation and also unable to recognize more subtle forms of confrontation as being aggressive (e.g., glaring, coughing loudly, etc.). Only people with a significance orientation, i.e., who made status assignments rather than role prescriptions, were able to see the possible larger meanings or significance of particular acts or performances.

Research

Sapin's research attempted to demonstrate that performance-oriented subjects would engage in sex-role stereotyping while significance-oriented subjects would treat each person/situation scenario in terms of personal competence and behavioral opportunities rather than simple gender stereotypes.

Subjects: From an initial pool of 120 subjects who were administered the test for significance/performance competency, only 10 met the criteria for being able to take significance into account when making judgments of specific behavioral episodes. Ten additional subjects were randomly assigned from the large group who demonstrated a capacity for only performative judgments on the test.

Method: In order to test for sex-role stereotyping versus status assignment and negotiation, Sapin devised a series of 6 scenarios that described

various behavioral-episodes. The gender of characters in the scenarios was systematically varied across different versions that were identical in all other respects.

For each scenario, two critical behavioral options are identified. One is performative and the other is an option exemplifying some possible significance for the behavior in the context described. Subjects were asked to rate a set of behaviors including the critical options with respect to twenty adjectives taken from the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974). One-third of the adjectives are "masculine," one-third "feminine" and one-third "neutral" with respect to traditional stereotypes.

For the two subject groups (S and P) mean ratings of the critical behaviors (P and S, or obvious/nonobvious) on the Bem adjective lists across the male and female character versions of the same scenario were calculated.

Results: The results showed that while performative subjects sex stereotyped the behavior of characters in all scenarios, the significance-oriented subjects showed no stereotyping effects. They rated each situation in terms of the appropriateness of behaviors in that situation and did not use irrelevant sex-role prescriptions (either traditional or androgynous).

Table 1 presents the ratings for performative subjects and reveals an interesting effect for type of critical response rated. For the obvious (performative) behavioral option, these subjects engaged in counter-stereotyping, e.g., they rated the female character as more "masculine" than the male character in the same scenario. However, for the more subtle (non-obvious) significant behavioral option, the performative subjects showed typical sex-stereotyping behavior, i.e., male characters were rated more "masculine"

and female characters more "feminine."

Discussion

Sapin's research clearly demonstrates that sex-role typing depends on a person's competency to make certain kinds of distinctions regarding behavior. People who are not able to see the potential significance of particular behaviors in terms of actual personal characteristics and situational opportunities tend to use "ready-made" performative ascriptions (based on cultural scripts). However, people who can distinguish between performative and significance aspects of behavior (parts/whole relationships) do not need role prescriptions to dictate their status ascriptions in particular situations.

The research also shed light on the methodological problems facing current measures of androgyny. It was noted earlier that college students especially want to present themselves in conformity to the popular "egalitarian" norms of personal relationships even though their actual behavior is typically based on traditional sex-stereotypes. Current face-valid measures of androgyny are susceptible to this kind of social desirability bias.

The results in Table 1 demonstrate this kind of problem dramatically. For the obvious "performative" behavioral option, performative subjects (the vast majority in the initial college subject pool) counter-stereotyped, i.e., they were leaning over backwards to avoid presenting themselves as traditional sex-role typers. However, with the more subtle (significance) behavioral option, performative subjects fell back on their typical sex-stereotyped judgments. So the current measurement method is able to deal with the problem of social desirability by presenting performative/stereotyping subjects with behavioral options within specified scenarios that these types of subjects are not able to deal with except in their typical performative manner.

Table 1

Analysis of Group P: Comparisons of Character M, F for All Stories

Options	Adjective	Male Character $\bar{X}$	Male Character S	Female Character $\bar{X}$	Female Character S	P
P & S	gullible	3.53	.46	2.33	.29	.030
P only	Fem. adj. tot.	34.60	3.08	24.29	3.33	.031
	assertive	4.93	.80	6.93	.58	.053
	soft-spoken	5.73	.70	3.86	.60	.053
	warm	6.33	.75	4.00	.75	.036
	gullible	3.73	.72	2.00	.41	.050
	indirect	4.40	.65	2.29	.47	.015
S only	masc. adj. tot.	40.43	3.08	25.06	3.26	.010
	fem. adj. tot.	23.50	2.88	36.81	2.50	.002
	aggressive	6.71	.41	4.12	.58	.001
	assertive	7.00	.60	4.56	.66	.012
	competitive	6.64	.61	3.82	.62	.003
	dominant	6.36	.67	3.94	.54	.008
	forceful	6.71	.61	3.80	.59	.002
	gentle	4.50	.60	6.69	.61	.016
	understanding	4.43	.76	7.62	.50	.001

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